

Rationale and Objectives for the First Lessons Learned Meeting on Sierra Leone

In order to enrich the discussions of the PBC country-specific meetings (CSM) on Sierra Leone, the Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL) will convene a series of informal discussions on lessons relevant to the four peacebuilding priority areas identified by the government of Sierra Leone. The WGLL will aim to develop forward-looking lessons and recommendations based on significant efforts that have already been made by Sierra Leone, with assistance from the UN and other partners, as well as good practices and experiences of other post-conflict countries.

The first meeting of the WGLL will focus on peacebuilding lessons and good practices on governance issues which are central to the country's overall development and peacebuilding goals as outlined in the Sierra Leone Peace Consolidation Strategy as well as the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Sierra Leone's second post-conflict presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for 28 July 2007.

From a peacebuilding perspective, the period leading up to and following elections in post-conflict contexts invariably generates high risks. It is important to understand and avoid the risks to Sierra Leone's democratic transition and support the full implementation of recommendations of the PCS in this regard. The experiences from countries that have conducted several rounds of elections after conflict (e.g. Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, Nicaragua) and the lessons extracted from those elections may provide additional support for Sierra Leone.

The meeting will address the following questions:

1. *What are the types of risks posed by elections in post-conflict contexts and in Sierra Leone in particular?*
 - Polarization of politics and renewal of former grievances
 - Closing of the "political space"
 - Strategies of competing political parties
 - Spoilers (economic, social and political)
 - Failure to accept the outcome of the election
 - Role of the media
 - Frustrations of youth and other disadvantaged groups
 - Perceptions/expectations of unfair play
 - Undue influence of regional/international actors
 - Unsatisfactory record of the government's performance

2. *What efforts have been made in Sierra Leone to avoid these risks and to ensure political and social cohesion and cross-party and multi-sector dialogue? Are these efforts adequate? What additional capacities are*

- needed by national actors and how can the UN and other actors help build these capacities?*
3. *What strategies have been used to avoid such risks in other post-conflict situations? To what extent, and in what ways, were they successful?*
 4. *What lessons can be extracted for a) the government; b) civil society, including the media; c) donors, UN and other international actors; and d) the PBC?*

Format and Structure

This open meeting will be held in Conference Room 6 from 10:00-13:00 hrs on 20 February 2007. It will consist of a panel of experts, enriched by interventions from the floor by selected representatives from post-conflict countries and a general discussion. Experts from the UN and civil society will provide a situation analysis from Sierra Leone and comparative overview of lessons learned from other cases such as Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

Background Documents

PBSO in consultation with other UN entities will prepare a background paper highlighting key issues and overall lessons learned on the promotion of democracy and elections in general, as well as a selected list of key resources on elections and Sierra Leone and other post-conflict countries.

Output

A summary report of the meeting will be produced by the Chair of the Working Group.